Chapter. 97

Other Family

While I was drying the laundry, the phone rang.

I heard the voice say 'It's been quite some time, hasn't it? It's Rei.'

— I thought "Oh, this is one of those 'Hey, it's me' scams." but then

When I picked up the receiver, I heard a feeble voice say 'hello'

'How are you doing right now?'

When the voice said that

— The owner of the voice was

HELLO.

the boy that had been part of my household until a few years earlier.

GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, TAROU.

EVERYTHING GOING OKAY WITH YOU?

SFX: WAF... HIN...

SFX: HIN HIN

TAROU, YOU'VE BECOME SUCH AN OLD MAN.

YOU'RE ALWAYS SLEEPING RIGHT AROUND HERE ALL THE TIME AS OF LATE, AREN'T YOU?

IS THAT RIGHT, TAROU? ⋮

SASA

IS AYUMU-KUN DOING WELL?

AND KYOUKO-SAN...?

AYUMU IS IN PREP SCHOOL RIGHT NOW

AND KYOUKO

IS DOING TEMP WORK, I GUESS ONE MIGHT SAY. SHE'S MOVING AROUND ALL OVER THE PLACE.

— Just like it did back then

If Kyouko or Ayumu had been here, then the living room would probably have froze.

BOX: MIKAZUKI TEMPLE

— Yes.

IF YOU WANT....

OH, THESE SWEETS ARE FROM THOSE CANDY SALESPEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN HELPING YOU SO MUCH RECENTLY.

I was relieved that the boy had come when I was alone.

—And while I gave him those answers,

speaks this boy's name anymore.

IN SUCH A LONG TIME.

I'M SORRY I NEVER CALLED YOU OR ANYTHING

No one in this house

'I was worried. I hadn't seen you in so long, after all.'

— I thought of saying that, but I held my tongue.

This boy knew about all that,

that's why he didn't come here.

And

we faced each other as I awkwardly sat there

unable to look him in the eye

Gentle ...

— Yes, gentle ...

The atmosphere around this boy had become so very gentle.

He'd become an adult.

— It's a simple explanation. It would be clear as day to any onlooker

It was at a relatively early stage that I realized my kids were not match for him.

that the amount of practice he did was on another level.

My son is still

the same kid he always was.

He's the same age as Ayumu? — I can hardly believe it.

If the question came to whether they could do it or not,

they couldn't.

The answer was simple.

— But

they would have to practice more than him or they would never get anywhere.

If they still didn't want to lose to him,

my kids had their minds shaken by their own weakness

they were collapsing into little pieces.

In front of him progressing as he silently embodied the idea of sound reasoning.

'People that need others to bring out motivation in them will eventually come to a standstill anyhow.' That's my husband's pet theory.

and my husband just said nothing and watched.

My own children rebelled against me and I was lost

— That was probably the moment that he gave up on Ayumu being a 'shogi player'.

'Ha!'

my husband laughed.

and with those words

And one day, Ayumu came out with 'I mean, being able to work hard is a talent itself!'

Unable to look their own weakness in the eye, they were swallowed by enjoyment that was within arm's reach.

had to pursue it this far.

was that people who had a 'place they wanted to reach'

The thing they realized when they saw that boy

seeing those kids like that weighed depressingly on my chest.

or 'What do I have to do to become what I want?'

For me, someone that had never thought things like 'Only a handful of people can become what they want to be.'

And one day, I finally realized.

That my husband is a man that walked the same path as that boy when he himself was a boy.

I'd tried to understand, but I really didn't.

If you could see past the thing called shogi, you could see that the one in the house that my husband related to the most

was not in our family, it was that boy.

He devoted himself whole-heartedly into shogi.

He studied without uttering a word and he helped out with the household, too.

He really was a good boy.

And that made it all the more painful for our two children...

Why is it this boy is such a good boy?

Why didn't my kids grow up this way?

What was different about the way his mother raised him and how I raised mine?

— Did I make some mistake in the way I raised my kids?

Is he pushing himself really hard to act the role of a 'good boy' because he's paying nothing to stay here?

Maybe he's actually insulting us behind our backs.

— No.....

That's not it...

He, Rei, really just was a good boy...

— And he felt

I never gave him a place to belong.

We took advantage of him, pushed him away, and treated him carelessly.

knew that, we took advantage of Rei.

My kids — and me

— But he never even said that out loud —

and quietly left the house.

'As long as I'm here, everyone's just going to feel more and more strained.'

— What else could I say, after all?

— 'See you soon.' I answered in kind.

he simply said 'I'll see you again some other time.'

Without trying to find any closing remarks to say,

— and said 'Well...'

When the five o'clock bell chimed, Rei stood up from his seat

LIVE A LONG TIME, OKAY?

AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

just like usual.

and I started work on dinner in the kitchen

Rei left

make dinner, and wait for everyone.

I stand here,

every day,

Even if no one contacts me,

and when I said 'Get to bed soon!' he talked back saying 'quiet down'.

watching TV,

sprawled out in the living room eating sweets,

He had become like most children

A dream where Rei was really my son.

That night, I had a dream.

—I

But deep in my heart

Ayumu and Kyouko, isn't it?'

felt drained thinking 'What? This is just like

I was relieved.

Chapter 97 END

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